

Story #258 (Tape #41, 1961-1962) Narrator: Nuri Genç
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Tevfik Bey and Köse Ağa

There was a Köse Ağa who lived near Antioch. He was not a köse really, but he was called köse. He had a big farm on the Plain of Antioch. A farmer friend named Tevfik Bey decided to call on him one evening and maybe spend the night with him, since it was getting late. Köse Ağa, who met Tevfik Bey on the outskirts of the village, said to him after exchanging greetings, "There is an epidemic in the village. As a matter of fact, we are under quarantine. You can enter the village, but not leave it."

When Tevfik Bey heard this, he turned and went away. When Tevfik Bey returned home, he sent a wire to Sultan Abdul Hamit II*. "I have recently visited a village where a man called Köse Ağa complained bitterly about the state of the nation under your majesty's rule. He added that if things were not improved, he would reject his Turkish citizenship and become a British subject."

Sultan Abdul Hamit II was a very suspicious man, and this was reason enough for him to have Köse Ağa arrested and sent to a jail in Adana.

*Hamit or Hamid II, who ruled for thirty-three years (1876-1909), was an infamous despot who stayed in power by means of a vast system of secret police and informers. He kept Turkey backward. There are many folktales about those who opposed him.

Fahri Paşa was governor of Adana at the time. There were very few people in the region of Adana who were not robbed by this cruel governor, who was, in fact, one of the chief informers of the padişah. He thought that he had a good victim to rob when he heard that Köse Ağa was put in the Adana jail on such a serious charge as treason. He had Köse Ağa brought to his presence one day. The Paşa had supposed that Köse Ağa was beardless, and he was surprised when he saw him. He said to him, "They used to call you köse, but you have got an armful of beard."

Köse Ağa said, "Most of the reports about me are wrong, like this. I am called a köse, but I am not; I have a large beard. It is just like the accusation against me; it is also a fake report."

Very pleased with this reply, Fahri Paşa released Köse Ağa, getting less in bribes than he would otherwise have extorted.